

**INTERWAR EUROPE
(1919-1939): ALL QUIET
ON THE WESTERN
FRONT**



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Description

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, including selections from *All Quiet on the Western Front*, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story behind the main characters and plot of Remarque's novel, how the character of Paul develops over time, and how the novel itself might be seen by some as socialist propaganda.

Subjects

English / Language Arts, European History, World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Invalids' Cemetery, Berlin
- Museum of the Great War, Péronne, France
- Remarque Peace Center, Osnabruck
- Remarque Institute, New York University

Essential Questions

- Who was Erich Remarque?
- What is the story / plot behind Remarque's most famous novel, All Quiet on the Western Front?
- How was the novel received when it was published?

Academic Summary

Excerpts from *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Preface

This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.

Chapter 1 (excerpt)

Today is wonderfully good. The mail has come, and almost every man has a few letters and papers. We stroll over to the meadow behind the billets. Kropp has the round lid of a margarine tub under his arm.

... I well remembered how embarrassed we were as recruits in barracks when we had to use the general latrine. There were no doors and twenty men sat side by side as in a railway carriage, so that they could be reviewed all at one glance, for soldiers must always be under supervision.

Since then we have learned better than to be shy about such trifling immodesties. In time things far worse than that came easy to us.

Here in the open air though, the business is entirely a pleasure. I no longer understand why we should always have shied at these things before. They are, in fact, just as natural as eating and drinking. We might perhaps have paid no particular attention to them had they not figured so large in our experience, nor been such novelties to our minds--to the old hands they had long been a mere matter of course.

Chapter 7 (excerpt)

Just as we turn into animals when we go up to the line . . . so we turn into wags and loafers when we are resting. . . . We want to live at any price; so we cannot burden ourselves with feelings which, though they may be ornamental enough in peacetime, would be out of place here. Kemmerich is dead, Haie Westhus is dying . . . Martens has no legs anymore, Meyer is dead, Max is dead, Beyer is dead, Hammerling is dead . . . it is a damnable business, but what has it to do with us now -- we live.

Chapter 9 (excerpt)

The silence spreads. I talk and must talk. So I speak to him and say to him: "Comrade, I did not want to kill you. If you jumped in here again, I would not do it, if you would be sensible too. But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony--Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy? If we threw away these rifles and this uniform you could be my brother just like Kat and Albert. Take twenty years of my life,

comrade, and stand up--take more, for I do not know what I can even attempt to do with it now."

Chapter 10 (excerpt)

I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another. I see that the keenest brains of the world invent weapons and words to make it yet more refined and enduring. And all men of my age, here and over there, throughout the whole world see these things; all my generation is experiencing these things with me.

Chapter 11 (excerpt)

We do not see the guns that bombard us; the attacking lines of the enemy infantry are men like ourselves; but these tanks are machines, their caterpillars run on as endless as the war, they are annihilation, they roll without feeling into the craters, and climb up again without stopping, a fleet of roaring, smoke-belching armor-clads, invulnerable steel beasts squashing the dead and the wounded--we shrivel up in our thin skin before them, against their colossal weight our arms are sticks of straw, and our hand-grenades matches. Shells, gas clouds, and flotillas of tanks--shattering, corroding, death. Dysentery, influenza, typhus--scalding, choking, death. Trenches, hospitals, the common grave--there are no other possibilities.

In one attack our Company Commander, Bertinck, falls. He was one of those superb front-line officers who are foremost in every hot place. He was with us for two years without being wounded, so that something had to happen in the end. We occupy a crater and get surrounded. The stink of petroleum or oil blows across with the fumes of powder. Two fellows with a flamethrower are seen, one carries the tin on his back. The other has the hose in his hands from which the fire spouts. If they get so near that they can reach us we are done for, we cannot retreat yet.

Chapter 12 (excerpt)

Had we returned home in 1916, out of the suffering and the strength of our experiences we might have unleashed a storm. Now if we go back we will be weary, broken, burnt out, rootless, and without hope. We will not be able to find our way anymore. And men will not understand us--for the generation that grew up before us, though it has passed these years with us already had a home and a calling; now it will return to its old occupations, and the war will be forgotten--and the generation that has grown up after us will be strange to us and push us aside. We will be superfluous even to ourselves, we will grow older, a few will adapt themselves, some others will merely submit, and most will be bewildered;--the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin. ... I stand up.

I am very quiet. Let the months and years come, they can take nothing from me, they can take nothing more. I am so alone, and so without hope that I can confront them without fear. The life that has borne me through these years is still in my hands and my eyes. Whether I have subdued it, I know not. But so

long as it is there it will seek its own way out, heedless of the will that is within me.

Chapter 12 (end)

He fell in October 1918, on a day that was so quiet and still on the whole front, that the army report confined itself to the single sentence:

All Quiet on the Western Front.

He had fallen forward and lay on the earth as though sleeping. Turning him over one saw that he could not have suffered long; his face had an expression of calm, as though almost glad the end had come.

In 1929, ten years after the end of the Great War, Erich Remarque published *All Quiet on the Western Front*. A relatively short (12-chapter) novel on the horrors and futility of war, the work became an instant best seller in English and German. Within eighteen months, the book had been translated into 25 different languages and had sold 2.5 million copies.

Remarque had served as a soldier in the German army on the Western Front. After being drafted in 1917 at age 18, he was sent to the trenches in Northern France, but was only there for a short time (about a month) before taking shrapnel in the left leg, right arm and neck. He spent the remainder of the war convalescing at an army hospital in Germany. After the war, the young man turned briefly to teaching and then to writing when his first novel, *The Dream Room*, was published in 1920. Remarque continued to publish different pieces throughout the 1920s, but with only moderate success. *All Quiet on the Western Front* changed everything.

The novel tells the story of the Great War from the prospective of Paul Baumer, a soldier whose character stands as the personification of millions of young men on all sides of the Great War. Filled with ideological hyper-nationalism by his teachers, elders and German society before the war, Paul and his friends enlist right after graduation to do their duty for the Fatherland, Kaiser and God. After training, he and his comrades are quickly sent to the front, where they meet up with veterans like Stanislaus Katczinsky (known in the novel as "Kat"). In the beginning, the young man sees the Western Front as an adventure, albeit one filled with death and destruction. Over time, however, as his friends die and the war drags on, Paul begins to change.

A defining moment comes in Chapter 9, when Paul kills a French soldier with his bare hands. On a night mission, Paul is caught in "no man's land" between the French and German trenches, and is forced to spend time lying in a shell crater waiting for an opportunity to get back to his side. During the night, a French soldier jumps into the crater (not knowing Paul was in there), and Paul, reacting without thinking, subsequently stabs him in the chest. He's forced to listen to the French soldier gasp for air as he slowly dies from the wound, taking several hours to do so. After he dies, Paul has a somewhat macabre conversation with his French counterpart. He comes to know the man's name (Girad Duval) and his profession (printer) from paperwork in the soldier's pocket. When Paul also finds photographs of the dead man's family, he realizes that he killed not just a soldier, but also a husband and father.

For the first time, Paul is forced to come face-to-face with the fact that he took another individual human life, not some vague figure at a distance but an actual man with

hopes, dreams and a family. The French soldier in the crater isn't just a faceless shadow in a blue uniform, but rather a real man. Paul asks for "forgiveness" from Duval, calls him a "comrade" and wonders why the men who sent them both to the trenches have lied about nationalism. Perhaps soldiers on all sides are really the same. Paul comes to realize, however, that he cannot function at the front with those feelings. Eventually, Paul makes it back to his own lines, but he is forever changed and hardened by his experience. Throughout the rest of the novel, Paul, learns to accept defeatism. By the end of the war, his friends are gone, including Kat, killed senselessly with only weeks left before the end of the conflict. As the end nears amid the rumors of peace, Paul begins to ponder what will happen to him and to other soldiers after the war. He knows his generation has been forever scarred. Even if he ends up in his hometown, will he ever really be "home"?

In the last paragraph of the book, Paul quietly stands up in his trench. An unnamed sniper on the other side gets a clear shot. The end had come. The German dies peacefully with an expression of relief.

Remarque's novel was made into a movie in 1930. The images stunned audiences across the world (although like many movies there are some inconsistencies between the book and the movie). The film won the Academy Awards that year for Outstanding Production and Best Director. Since its first publication in 1929, the book has gone through several editions, selling tens of millions of copies around the globe in over 20 languages. At different times over its lifetime, the book has been banned in many different countries, including Germany during the Nazi era (the movie was banned as well). It continues to be read today as perhaps the quintessential example of anti-war literature from the period.

Through the use of various primary and secondary sources, including selections from *All Quiet on the Western Front*, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story behind the main characters and plot of Remarque's novel, how the character of Paul develops over time, and how the novel itself might be seen by some as socialist propaganda.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain the story and plot behind Erich Remarque's novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*.
2. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how the character of Paul Baumer develops over time throughout the course of the novel.
3. Students will identify, analyze, understand and be able to explain how Remarque's novel could be considered socialist propaganda.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Explain the following sentence (5 min)
- Dulce et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori – It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country.
- Handouts – Copies of the primary sources and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – All Quiet on the Western Front (20 min)
- Video – All Quiet on the Western Front: A Synopsis (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the sources and articles on All Quiet. (20 min)
- Suggestion: All students should be given time to read the novel in its entirety.
- Suggestion: Break students into groups and assign different articles to each group.
- Suggestion: AP/Advanced students should concentrate on primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Discussion: Discussion on All Quiet on the Western Front (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay / DBQ: Explain in detail the story behind the main characters and plot of Remarque's novel, how the character of Paul develops over time, and how the novel itself might be seen by some as socialist propaganda (which is why it was banned).
- Alternate Assessment: Theorize how the story might be rewritten using modern American soldiers coming home from the war in Afghanistan and/or Iraq. Is the book timeless or is it specific to the Great War?

Extension

On tour: Verdun Battlefield Museum and the Douamont Ossuary

While on tour, students can visit the Verdun Battlefield Museum and the Douamont Ossuary (on the battlefield), where they can see for themselves the devastation and human costs of war. A solemn place, the Douamont Ossuary itself contains over 130,000 unidentified French and German soldiers who died at Verdun. They are “buried” in the alcoves and the remains can be seen through small outside windows. Outside the Ossuary, the cemetery contains thousands more identified soldiers. After the “Hell of Verdun”, it is a wonder why the sides decided to go at it again a generation later in an even more destructive war. On the grounds of the cemetery, students will also see a monument to Muslim soldiers from Algeria and Morocco (French colonies in 1916) who died at Verdun.

On tour: Erich Maria Remarque Peace Center, Osnabruck, Germany

While on tour, students in Germany can visit the Erich Maria Remarque Peace Center in Osnabruck, Germany (about 1 hour east of the Netherlands border) in the author’s hometown. Remarque left Germany for Switzerland in 1931 and in 1939 immigrated to the United States. He returned to Switzerland after the war. The Peace Center opened in Osnabruck in 1996, five years after the city began awarding a peace price similar to the Nobel. At the center, which is located in the town library, students will have the opportunity to learn all about the author and see a collection of his many works. The center is dedicated to the field of war and peace and its representation in various forms of media worldwide. Admission is free.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.myteacherpages.com/webpages/esimpson/files/AQWF%20-%20full%20text.pdf
Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (primary source) – full text PDF version
- www.randomhouse.com/highschool/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780449213940&view=tg
All Quiet on the Western Front (teacher's guide) – from Random House Publishing
- www.webenglishteacher.com/remarque.html
All Quiet on the Western Front (website) – contains links to different lesson plans for using the book in English classes.
- http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/all_quiet.pdf
All Quiet on the Western Front (study guide) – from Glencoe Textbook Publishers. This study guide contains a number of worksheets designed to help students in reading and understanding the novel. A great resource, this study guide is recommended for all students.
- <http://remarque.as.nyu.edu/page/home>
Remarque Institute at New York University (website)
- <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/allquiet/>
All Quiet on the Western Front (study guide)
- www.mercerlandschools.org/cms/lib3/WA01001855/Centricity/Domain/1457/AQWF%20Study%20Guide.pdf
All Quiet on the Western Front (study guide) – from the Mercer Island School District (WA)
- www.ualberta.ca/~caaftink/Quiet.ppt_files/Quiet.ppt
All Quiet on the Western Front (PowerPoint) – from Cathelain Aaftink at the University of Alberta (Canada) Comparative Literature Program
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=IHNKGK9y2Q4
All Quiet on the Western Front: A Synopsis (video) – 3-minute video done for an Advanced Honors English class. Highly recommended for all students and classes.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NDAPxcMdHg>
Western Front (video). This BBC documentary, at almost 3 hours long in total (6 parts), is probably too long for most in-class showings. Highly recommended as an out-of-class assignment, especially for AP/advanced students, as it is considered by some to be the best documentary ever created about trench warfare on the front.

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erich_Maria_Remarque
Erich Maria Remarque – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_Quiet_on_the_Western_Front
All Quiet on the Western Front – Wikipedia article
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Front_\(World_War_I\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_Front_(World_War_I))
Western Front (World War I) – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/austria/great-war-austrian-ultimatum-to-serbia
Great War – Serbian Front: Austrian Ultimatum of 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-causes-of-the-war-1914
Great War – Lights Going Out in 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-wilfred-owen
England and the Great War – Wilfred Owen: Dulce et Decorum Est
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-battle-of-the-somme
Great War – Battle of the Somme 1916
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/battle-of-verdun-1916
Great War – Battle of Verdun
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-first-battle-of-the-marne-1914
Great War – First Battle of the Marne 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/great-war-schlieffen-plan
Great War – Germany: The Schlieffen Plan
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/interwar-europe-lost-generation-hemingway-sun-also-rises
Interwar Europe – Hemingway: Sun Also Rises
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/interwar-europe-remarque-all-quiet
Interwar Europe (1919-1939) – Remarque: All Quiet on the Western Front
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/weimar-gropius-bauhaus-and-internationalism
Walter Gropius and the Bauhaus: International Art and Architecture in the Weimar Republic
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/switzerland/interwar-europe-dadaism
Interwar Europe (1919-1939) – Dadaism: Rejecting Modernity's Chaos

Key Terms

- Anti-war literature
- Erich Remarque
- Great War
- Western Front

